

## CORINTHIANS - The MORE EXCELLENT WAY

### STUDY 8

# Apostolic advice to the lovelorn

... this I say for your benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is seemly [that you may live in a right way, *NIV*], and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord.

1 COR.7:35

#### Study 8a: Sex and Self-control (7:1-9)

##### 7:1,7,8 What is obviously Paul's ideal?

##### 7:2-6,9 Yet what concessions does he make?

The term [purousthai], *to burn*, does not at all apply to the torments of hell, as Tertullian and Pelagius thought. Paul by this word denotes every painful exercise of soul; comp. 2 Cor. xi. 29; here: the fire of inward lusts in conflict with conscience. [Godet 331]

#### Study 8b: Is Separation Ever Permissible? (7:10-24)

##### 7:10-16 What is the ONLY ground for separation (= biblical divorce) that Paul permits?

[v.10] Does he mean that his apostolical commands are less infallible than those of the Lord? But this would be to sap apostolical authority with his own hands, and the words, xiv. 37, where he calls certain prescriptions in regard to worship a commandment of the Lord, would certainly not confirm this distinction. He means rather to establish the difference between the commands given expressly by the Lord, which have consequently indisputable force for the whole Church, and those which emanate from himself, and which, as such, are law only for the Churches founded by him and subject to his apostleship. [Godet 333]

[v.11] Catholic law absolutely forbids divorce, even in the case of adultery, while Protestant law in these circumstances allows it. And, as to second marriage,

Protestant law likewise permits it, put only to the innocent party. The refusal of divorce in the case of adultery seems to us to transgress the meaning of the Lord's words; for by these adultery is implicitly put on the same footing as death. And, as to the right of remarriage granted to the innocent party, it does not seem to me at all contrary to the text of Scripture. But what seems to me absolutely irreconcilable with the Lord's words, is the readiness with which Protestant pastors, becoming the agents of a purely civil legislation, consent to bless *in the name of the Lord* marriages contracted between persons whose first marriage had not been dissolved for the only reason authorized by the Lord, so that this new union, according to His positive declaration, is adultery. To bless on His part what He Himself characterizes so severely is a strange way of acting in His name. [Godet 335]

##### 7:17-24 How will Paul's advice about remaining in one's situation or station reflect the Christian's social responsibility? (Matt.5:9-16)

#### Study 8a: Undistracted Devotion to the Lord (7:25-40)

##### 7:25-28 The controlling principles for unmarried persons

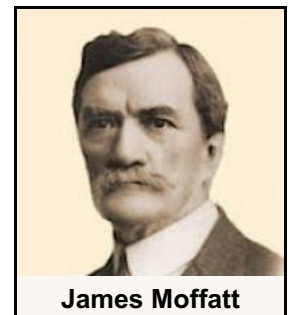
[v.25] The words are very instructive, as showing with what precision he distinguished apostolical inspiration from Christian inspiration in general, making the former not only the highest degree, but something specifically different from the second. He thus, with a consciousness perfectly assured, traced the limit between what he had directly received by way of revelation, with a view to his *apostolic* teaching, and what he himself deduced from Christian premisses by his own reflections, as any believer may do under the guidance of the Spirit. We thus see what is implied in his view by the title of *apostle*, under the guarantee of which he places the contents of his Epistles. He was not of the mind -- as is sought to persuade the Church in our day -- that his gospel was only the result of his meditations and researches. [Godet 368]

##### 7:29-35 How are married, separated and unmarried all subject to the same HIGHEST priority?

##### 7:36-40 Note how Paul is concerned not only for that which is seemly for the Lord's purpose, but also for the peace and happiness of the Christian (vv.5,8,9,15,26,28,32,35,37,38,40)

Moffatt points out that Paul's careful discrimination between a saying of the Lord and his own injunction tells strongly against those who maintain that the early Church was in the habit of producing the sayings it needed and then ascribing them to Christ. 'It is historically of high importance that he did not feel at liberty to create a saying of Jesus, even when, as here, it would have been highly convenient in order to settle a disputed point of Christian behaviour.' [Morris 109]

The apostle on this point does not arrogate more to himself than a *view*, an *advice*, the value of which



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every one can appraise at his pleasure. It is evident how far he was removed from that exaltation which makes fanatics take all their ideas for revelations ... We are led, therefore, to distinguish here three degrees of authority, -- 1. The direct commands *of the Lord*, which He gave during His sojourn on the earth, and which Paul merely quotes discussing their grounds (ver. 10). 2. The *apostolic* commands of the apostle, which are imposed on Churches subject to his jurisdiction, and which he gives them as the organ of a higher illumination attached to his special mission. As to these he is careful to expound their reasons, being unwilling to ask his brethren to give a *blind* obedience (vers. 12-17); comp. x. 15. 3. The directions which he gives as a *simple Christian*, which he himself declares to be purely optional, and which he leaves to the judgment of every believer (ver. 25). Far from confounding these different degrees, and assimilating, for example, the second with the third, we should recognize and admire the precision with which the apostle distinguished them and could draw the practical consequences of the distinction. [Godet 396-397]

are insufficient, from the historical point of view, to authorize a sure conclusion either on the one side or the other. It is therefore for exegesis to enlighten history rather than the reverse. [Godet 346-348]

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## What about infant baptism?

As Jewish children did not become children of Abraham by circumcision, so it is with the children of Christians. Their consecration to God does not depend on their baptism; but their fitness for baptism arises from the solidarity of life which unites them to their parents, and through them to the covenant of grace founded in Christ, and in which these live. Until Christian children decide freely for or against the salvation which is offered to them, they enjoy the benefit of this provisional situation, and are placed with all belonging to the family in communication with the holy forces which animate the body of Christ ... German commentators are almost unanimous (except Hofmann, who here follows a way of his own) in regarding infant baptism as incompatible with these words of the apostle. The latest English critics (Edwards, Beet), though knowing the German works, do not adhere to the conclusion drawn in them, and do not believe the words to be incompatible with the ecclesiastical practice of baptizing infants. For my part, I do not find Paul's expressions intelligible except on the supposition that this practice existed ... But does not ecclesiastical history protest against our exegetical result as false? With the exception of two passages, the one from Origen, the other from Tertullian, it is silent on the point before us. Now, of these two passages, that of Origen is positive in favour of the apostolic origin of infant baptism (*Comment. in epist. ad Rom.* t. v. 9): "The Church learned from the apostles that it ought to give baptism to infants." In the second, Tertullian, after his going over to Montanism (*De baptismo*, c. 18), dissuades parents from baptizing their children; which proves that the practice existed in his time, but that Tertullian himself did not regard it as apostolical. These facts

